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ABSTRACT

Empathy is important in social adjustment, and teachers can assist in its development in children. This paper suggests a rationale for encouraging the use of empathy related literature and provides teachers with a children's literature resource of realistic picture books whose stories evoke feelings of empathy. The books listed in this paper were selected because they realistically deal with emphatic elements which will appeal to children ages 4-8. (Contains 18 references.) (RS)

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DEVELOPING EMPATHY THROUGH CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

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Seven-year-old Joshua returns to class after being absent for two weeks with the flu. Although normally he comes to school happy, today he stands close to his mother at the door, eyes filled with tears as he looks into the room. One of the other children comes over and says, "it's okay, you're just sad because it's hard to leave home after you've been out for so long. That happens to me too."

How do children learn to empathize in this way? Is there a way teachers can support the development of empathy in the classroom?

In the past few years, writers such as Robert Coles (1997), in his book *The Moral Intelligence of Children* and Daniel Goleman (1995), in his book *Emotional Intelligence*, have argued that schooling is not just for cognitive development but must also include affective instruction. If, then, we are going to develop a quality primary education program we must look at the social and emotional domains of the classroom.

Katz and McClellan (1992) suggest that the best predictor of later social adjustment is the ability of a child to get along with peers. Given this far reaching consequence, the importance of establishing social competence in young children is critical. One way in which students can become socially competent is through developing empathetic responses.

If empathy is so important in social adjustment, how can a teacher assist in its development? The focus of this paper is to suggest a rationale for encouraging the use of empathy related literature and to provide teachers with a children's literature resource of realistic picture books whose stories evoke feelings of empathy. The use of stories is supported by Coles (1989) who states , as an individual reflects on stories, "one remembers, one notices, then one makes connections---engaging the thinking mind as well as what is called the emotional side" (p. 128).

Empathy

Empathy is viewed as both a cognitive and affective process and has been defined in a number of ways. Empathy is sometimes referred to as a cognitive process, which involves

cognitive role taking or perspective taking as critical attributes of the definition (Deutsch & Madle, 1975). Feshback (1975) refers to empathy as an affective process in which a person is able to "share an emotional response with another as well as the ability to discriminate the other's perspective and role" (p.145). Hoffman (1984) defines empathy as "an affective response more appropriate to someone else's situation than to one's own." Eisenberg and Strayer (1990) identify empathy as "an emotional response that stems from another's emotional state or condition and is congruent with the other's emotional state or situation" (p.5). For the purpose of this discussion, empathy is viewed as both a cognitive and affective process.

Hoffman (1984) describes four developmental levels of empathy which children progress through. Infants are not able to separate self from others, but as a precursor to empathy they might cry when they hear the cry of other infants. The second level develops as the child is able to physically differentiate self from others. At two to three-years of age the third level begins to develop. Children become aware that others might have feelings which are different from their own based on the other person's needs. As children develop a sense of self and others the ability to empathize becomes stronger. As language develops children begin to empathize with a wide range of emotions. In the primary education years children develop the ability to empathize with a person who is not present. At this point perspective-taking is a part of the process. The fourth, more advanced level, develops in late childhood. At this point children become able to empathize not only with what happens in the present and in a person's absence, but also with chronic problems of a person, a group of people, or society as a whole.

Based on Hoffman's (1984) work, as children develop a sense of self and others the ability to empathize becomes stronger. However, as Slaby, Roedell, Arezzo, & Hendrix (1995) suggest, although practicing empathic responses might be relatively easy, even for preschoolers, the

transition to real life situations is more complex. One way a teacher can assist children in making the transfer to real-life is through the use of realistic children's literature.

Children's Literature

Realistic children's literature, is ideally suited to provide a means to assist students in discussing empathy through the use of story. The use of story becomes critical in the process of social development, since as Sholes (1981) explains, a story is "a narrative with a certain very specific syntactic shape (beginning-middle-end or situation-transformation-situation) and with a subject matter which allows for or encourages the projection of human values upon this material" (p.206).Through stories, children are able to bring meaning to their lives and make sense of their world (Schoafsma, 1989; Wells, 1986). This view is further supported by Hodges (1995) who writes that literature can be effective in teaching children social skills.

In deciding on a listing of books which could be utilized by teachers to assist children in their empathic development, we were influenced by the work of Iannotti (1975) who found that children ages six to nine begin to describe emotions consistent with pictures and stories and Lennon and Eisenberg (1990) who state that children become increasingly more able to respond to others in pictures and story scenarios as they grow into the mid-elementary ages.

The following stories were selected because they are realistic books dealing with empathetic elements which will appeal to children ages 4-8. Since more and more books are being published with empathic elements, this is, but a selective listing of some of the many old and new titles that can be used in the classroom.

Books.

Cocca-Leffler, M. (1998). Missing: One Stuffed Rabbit. Mrotn Grove, IL: Albert Whitman.
Janine takes Coco, the class stuffed rabbit home for the weekend. When Janine loses Coco, Janine and her family look everywhere. When Janine returns to school, she is very upset that she has lost the class pet. The class looks for the pet, and finally discover that it is being given to a young child at Children's Hospital. Janine and her classmates do not say anything to the girl about Coco's former life as the young girl names the toy Cinnamon.

Havill, J. (1995). Jamaica's Blue Marker. Illustrated by Anne Sibley O'Brien. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
Jamaica is happy that Russell is moving. He marks all over her picture, throws sand at her, and chases the other children at recess. When she realizes how Russell must feel about moving, she gives him one of her markers to use at his new school.

Havill, J. (1993). Jamaica and Brianna. Illustrated by Anne Sibley O'Brien. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
Jamaica and her best friend, Brianna both tease each other about each others boots. Through the sharing of emotional responses to each other, they come to better understand each other.

Havill, J. (1986). Jamaica's Find. Illustrated by Anne Sibley O'Brien. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
Jamaica finds a stuffed dog in the park and takes it home. After thinking about the toy, she brings it to the lost and found. At the end of the story, Jamaica finds the owner and reunites the child with the toy.

Havill, J. (1989). Jamaica's Tag-Along. Illustrated by Anne Sibley O'Brien. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
Jamaica's brother, Ossie, does not want her to "tag-along" while he is playing basketball with his friends. Jamaica's feelings are hurt so she goes to play in the sand next to a child who wants to help her build sand castles. At first she does not want to be bothered by the child, then she realizes that she is treating him the same way her brother treated her.

Hughes, S. (1997). Alfie and the Birthday Surprise. New York: Lothrop, Lee & Shepard.
When Smoky the cat dies, Bob, Alfie's neighbor is very sad. Alfie suggests that his family give Bob a birthday party with a new cat as a gift.

Fox, M. (1985). Wilfred Gordon McDonald Partridge. Illustrated by Julie Vivas. Brooklyn, NY: Kane/Miller.
Wilford Gordon McDonald Partridge lives next to an "old people's home." His favorite person to visit at the home is Nancy Alison Delacourt Cooper, who Wilford learns has lost her memory. Wilford asks others in the home "What's a memory?" Based on the answers he receives he develops a basket of objects which he hopes will help Nancy' memory.

Joosse, B. M. (1988). Better With Two. Illustrated by Catherine Stock. New York: Harper Collins.
Laura tries to cheer up her neighbor, Mrs. Brady, when the woman's dog dies. In time, Laura

succeeds in cheering up her friend by sharing herself.

Keats, E.J. (1975). Louie. New York: Greenwillow.
Susie and Roberto put on a neighborhood puppet show. Louie, whom Susie and Roberto have never heard speak, falls in love with Gussie the puppet and speaks to it during the performance. The story ends with Louie being given the puppet.

Knox-Wagner, E. (1982). My Grandpa Retired Today. Illustrated by Charles Robinson. Niles, IL: Albert Whitman.
As Margey helps her grandfather clean up his barber shop for the last time, she empathizes with his separation from the shop as he retires.

McCourt, L. (1997). Chicken Soup for Little Souls: The Best Night Out With Dad. Illustrated by Bert Dodson. Deerfield Beach, FL: Health Communications.
Danny is excited about seeing the circus again with his father. While waiting in line, Danny describes to a boy who has never been to the circus all of the wonderful shows . When it turns out that the boy and his father are unable to afford the price of admission, Danny decides to give the boy and his father his tickets. Danny and his father forego the circus and "shoot some hoops" for the evening.

McCourt, L. (1997). Chicken Soup for Little Souls: The Goodness Gorillas. Illustrated by Pat Grant Porter. Deerfield Beach, FL: Health Communications.
A group of students form a club to do good deeds. When the class bully's dog is killed, the club reaches out to him and he ends up joining the club too.

McCourt, L. (1997). Chicken Soup for Little Souls: The Never-Forgotten Doll. Illustrated by May O'Keefe Young. Deerfield Beach, FL: Health Communications
Ellie learns that her 88 year-old babysitter still remembers with sadness the lose of a prized china doll. Using her own money, Ellie purchases an antique doll and gives it to Miss Maggie for her birthday.

McCourt, L. (1998). Chicken Soup for Little Souls: The Braids Girl. Illustrated by Tim Ladwig. Deerfield Beach, FL: Health Communications.
Izzy goes with her Grandpa Mike to help out at the homeless shelter. While there she decides to try to help a girl who is about her same age. Although Izzy brings the young girl clothes and toys, Izzy realizes that the girl is still not happy. Finally, Izzy discovers that the way she can befriend the young girl is by being her friend.

Muldoon, K. M. (1989). Princess Pooh. Illustrated by .Niles, IL: Albert Whitman.
Patty is jealous of the attention her older, wheelchair-bound sister Penny receives. After trying the wheelchair herself, Patty understands the difficulties her sister experiences.

Rahaman, V. (1997). Read for Me, Mama. Illustrated by Lori McElrath-Eslick. Boyds Mills.
Joseph loves books. He brings home two each week. His mother always seems to have a good excuse for not reading to him. When Joseph discovers that his mother can not read, he supports

her in her efforts to learn to read.

Conclusion

Developing social competence is an important part of the education of primary children. Social development takes place in the classroom setting where children have many opportunities to engage in a variety of social situations throughout the day. Practicing empathy related behaviors and perspective-taking skills would seem a logical thread which could be woven through children's literature into the daily events of the classroom. As skillful teachers begin to weave realistic literature into the classroom, they will have numerous occasions to assist children in generalizing from fictional to real situations.

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